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KINDER AND LESS JUST: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MODERN GLEANING  
ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR PLACE WITHIN FOOD RECOVERY DISCOURSE

by

Anna C. Gorman

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate School  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts

College of the Pacific  
Food Studies

University of the Pacific  
Stockton, California

2019

KINDER AND LESS JUST: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MODERN GLEANING  
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## DEDICATION

To my parents, the most avid gleaners I know.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Polly Adema, Dr. Alice McLean, and Dr. Stephanie Maroney for your patient guidance, challenging questions, and unmitigated brilliance. Thank you to my Food Studies classmates for enthusiastically consuming every baked good I ever brought to class. Thank you to Jane and Mark for your unbelievable generosity. And finally, thank you to Nick for every night you spent on the phone with me as I drove home and for every word of love and encouragement. I couldn't have done it without you.

# Kinder and Less Just: A Critical Analysis of Modern Gleaning Organizations and Their Place Within Food Recovery Discourse

## Abstract

by Anna C. Gorman

University of the Pacific  
2019

The practice of gleaning began as a way for the poor to provide sustenance for themselves and their families. Changes in societal ideas about private property as well as a shift toward a neoliberal style of governance have caused gleaning to become what it is today: a practice primarily undertaken by charitable organizations, nonprofits, and church groups who then donate their bounty to local food banks, providing fresh produce to the food insecure. In modern society, gleaning is often held up as a single solution to the problems of food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food waste. This thesis complicates that discourse by analyzing the websites of five different San Francisco Bay Area gleaning groups to investigate how they present themselves as fitting into the larger conversation surrounding food charity, health, and food waste. This thesis uses qualitative and quantitative textual analysis to show how the language used on each organization's website illustrates the organization's relationship with those three values. Each organization presents itself as fitting into contemporary food recovery discourse in a different way: one focuses primarily on community building; one is looking to expand its model as far as possible; one seeks to be a solution to poor nutrition, food insecurity, and food waste in its community; one provides myriad resources to anyone looking; and one actively

embraces the food insecure. The differences among these organizations show the one-dimensionality of the current discourse surrounding gleaning as a single solution to food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food waste. While gleaning can, and does, have value, its focus on the individual's role in solving food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food waste, as well as its inability to provide long-term solutions, complicates its role in contemporary food recovery.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### LIST OF FIGURES

### CHAPTERS

1. Introduction .....	10
2. Historical Background .....	13
The Origins of Gleaning .....	13
The Diggers.....	15
Food Recovery in the Bay Area .....	17
3. Review of the Literature .....	19
Introduction .....	19
Gleaning .....	21
Food Waste .....	22
Food Charity and Emergency Food .....	24
‘Health’ and Food Access.....	26
4. Methodology .....	30
Textual Analysis .....	30
Quantitative analysis .....	31
Qualitative analysis .....	32
5. Results .....	35
Introduction.....	35
Biographies of Organizations .....	35
Farm to Pantry .....	35
The Urban Farmers .....	37



Alameda Backyard Growers .....	39
Village Harvest .....	40
Harvest Sacramento .....	42
Analysis by Theme .....	44
Food Charity .....	44
Theoretical Framework .....	44
Gleaning and Class .....	44
Class and Community .....	45
Gleaning as a Solution .....	48
Health .....	50
Theoretical Framework .....	50
Health and Community .....	51
The Access Argument .....	52
Food Waste .....	53
Theoretical Framework .....	53
Food Waste and Individualism .....	54
6. Conclusion .....	55
REFERENCES .....	57

## LIST OF FIGURES

## Figure

1. “The Gleaners” by Jean-Francois Millet, 1857.....	10
2. Farm to Pantry’s logo and slogan .....	35
3. A group of Farm to Pantry Gleaners, showcasing their focus on community.....	35
4. Farm to Pantry: .....	36
• Key Words: “Community,” “Healdsburg,” “Healthy,” “Local”	
• Key Concepts: Community, Health	
5. The Urban Farmers’ logo.....	37
6. A graphic included on The Urban Farmers’ website on the page about Open Source Production. ....	37
7. The Urban Farmers: .....	38
• Key Words: “People,” “Work,” “Need,” “Will,” “Can,” “Must”	
• Key Concepts: Action, Urgency	
8. Alameda Backyard Growers’ logo .....	39
9. Group of gleaners at a parade in July of 2012. This photo shows ABG’s emphasis on community. ....	39
10. Alameda Backyard Growers: .....	40
• Key Words: “Community,” “Alameda,” “Waste”	
• Key Concepts: Community, Food Waste	
11. Village Harvest slogan and logo .....	41
12. Village Harvest: .....	41
• Key Words: “Volunteers,” “Organizations,” “Information,” “Resources,” “.pdf”	
• Key Concepts: Community, Resources	
13. Harvest Sacramento logo .....	42
14. Harvest Sacramento: .....	43
• Key Words: “Community,” “Sacramento,” “Rosemont,” “Hollywood”	

## Chapter 1: Introduction



Figure 1: “The Gleaners” by Jean-Francois Millet, 1857

This thesis begins with a painting. Almost every thesis I’ve read about gleaning includes the above image as part of its introduction. Each author discusses how Jean-Francois Millet painted it in 1857 as a form of social critique, and how he used it to draw attention to the plight of the poor after the French Revolution (Badio, 2009; Marshman, 2015; Beischer, 2016). As one of the most famous depictions of gleaning, it certainly merits mention in a thesis about the topic. For me, however, the connection of the painting to this thesis is far more personal. *The Gleaners*, as it is titled, was constantly present throughout my childhood. It has hung on the dining room wall of my grandparents farmhouse in Idaho since my mom was a child, where her dad (my grandfather) farmed wheat, barley, grass seed, peas, and lentils for more than forty years. On a family trip to Paris in 2011, it was the only piece my art-museum-averse family made a point of seeing, skipping the Louvre in favor of the Musée d’Orsay. My mom bought a

puzzle of it and glued the pieces together so she could hang it on the wall the way her parents had. I loved the painting because it seemed so connected to my mom's agrarian upbringing, which I envied when I was young, but I didn't know anything about gleaning itself.

The painting is just one of the factors that lead me to my thesis. It combined with a growing passion for food waste, a critical nutrition class taken while completing preliminary research, and my retired parents becoming active members of a gleaning organization to push me toward writing a critical examination of modern gleaning. As I was researching, many articles I read had nothing but good things to say about gleaning. It is depicted as a historic practice that is resurfacing and seems to be solving every problem. It prevents food from being wasted while also providing food to the hungry, all while remedying the problem of poor nutrition in at-risk communities. At the same time, the scholarly articles I was reading lead me to believe that nothing was that simple. I agreed with many of the articles I read that lauded gleaning; I think it can, and does, have value in modern society. But I also couldn't ignore the arguments of the scholars I was reading. Gleaning, like everything else, is not simple, but the discourse around it has been until now.

The purpose of this thesis is to complicate the discourse showing gleaning as a purely meritorious practice. It accomplishes this by analyzing how gleaning organizations situate themselves and the practice within contemporary gleaning discourse, using three distinct values: food charity, health, and food waste. This thesis analyzes the websites of five different gleaning groups in the San Francisco Bay Area to investigate how they present themselves as fitting into the larger conversation surrounding these three values in relation to food recovery. While gleaning does have value in modern society, its focus on the individual's role in solving food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food waste, complicates its role in contemporary food recovery.

Chapter Two will explore the history of gleaning, from the original feudal gleaners to the food recovery groups of today. Chapter Three reviews the literature surrounding the three key values: food charity, health, and food waste, while also providing information about the state of literature surrounding gleaning itself. Chapter Four describes the methodology of this thesis, explaining how quantitative and qualitative textual analysis were both used to achieve a complete and contextualized analysis. Chapter Five outlines the results of the website analysis, opening with a short biography of each organization, and then going into depth about how the language used on each website explains how each respective organization presents itself regarding food charity, health, and food waste.

## Chapter 2: Historical Background

Gleaning in the twenty-first century looks very different from its original form. What began as a government-sanctioned way for the feudal poor to feed themselves has evolved into a form of charity seeking to help others achieve food security and solve the problem of poor nutrition and food waste. This chapter illustrates that evolution, starting from the Biblical definition and court cases defining private property in feudal England, and ending with the famous San Francisco Diggers and the first gleaning organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### The Origins of Gleaning

The original definition of gleaning dates back to sources as old as the Bible. The Old Testament explicitly states “when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God” (*New American Bible, Revised Edition*, Lev. 23:22). This statement is a direct order given to the Israelites from God through Moses. The practice of gleaning was adopted by Hebrew farmers and eventually made its way to Europe.

The historical practice of gleaning in the feudal societies of Europe, particularly England and France, has been extensively examined by multiple scholars (King, 1992; Vardi, 1993; Hussey, 1997). Peter King (1992) discussed the importance of gleanings to the rural poor between 1750 and 1850. Particularly in south and central England, gleanings were a key safety net when households faced times of scarcity (King, 2). Liana Vardi (1993) gave a historical contextualization for modern gleaning, providing information about how gleaning changed in France in the eighteenth century. Stephen Hussey (1997) examined gleaning in southern

England and how it didn't completely fade out until the middle of the twentieth century. Hussey illustrated, through interviews with former gleaners in Essex County, England, that while the purpose of gleaning was to provide food for oneself and one's family, there was still a sense of community that surrounded it. Each community had rules and regulations they held themselves to; a bell signaled the beginning and end of the gleaning day, and gleaners would play games with each other when they were gathered together before entering a field. Some villages even had a "glean queen" to enforce the rules and gently admonish those who disobeyed. One queen from Nottinghamshire, during her address at her coronation and proclamation, warned the gleaners, "Should any of my subjects enter an ungleaned field, without being led by me, their corn will be forfeited and it will be bestrewed" (Hussey, 64). In other parts of Essex, the queen's role was to control entry into the fields. This all began to change as the end of the eighteenth century drew nearer.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, the harvest fields where gleaning took place were considered communal land, or Commons. The idea of the Commons has been around since the fourth century BC, when Plato argued that it breeds a sense of cooperation and prevents divisiveness. Key intellectual figures from Aristotle to John Locke have argued against the Commons, stating that private property favors prudence and responsibility and discourages free-riders (Holt-Gimenez, 2017). In 1788, the landmark English court case *Steel v. Houghton* affirmed the arguments in favor of private property, ruling that "no person has common law, a right to glean in the harvest field" (Steel v. Houghton). The ruling was an attempt by farmers to put a stop to poor people's 'encroachment' on their land, and to lay claim to the gleanings of the valuable crops. The ensuing years involved peasant communities losing their feudal land rights to what came to be known as "enclosures," which favored large landowners who wanted the land

for commercial sheep production. The enclosures destroyed communal property rights, privatizing land that had previously been held for food cultivation and gathering by peasants. This privatization resulted in peasant riots and rebellions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Enclosures pushed more and more people off their own land; small farmers couldn't compete with the production of large landowners who imported expensive fertilizer and used intensive techniques characteristic of British high farming. As more people were pushed out of agriculture, farms became steadily larger, and the resulting influx of unemployed farmers provided the cheap, expendable labor that fueled Britain's Industrial Revolution. Despite the enclosures creating a rapid decrease in peasant farming, gleaning did not fade immediately. The feudal poor still gleaned after the ruling was handed down, despite the threat of violence and arrest (Holt-Gimenez, 2017). They remained visible in harvest fields until the mid-twentieth century. At that point, advancements in agricultural technology, specifically the combine harvester, rendered gleaners' yields minimal and no longer worth the effort.

### **The Diggers**

One way to link the gleaning of the past with the gleaning of today is the societal attitudes toward private property. As previously stated, the enclosures resulted in riots and rebellions by peasants who felt the closing off of communal land disenfranchised them. In 1649, when enclosures first started to appear in some parts of England, a group called The Diggers rose in opposition to them. The group originally called themselves "The True Levellers," in order to differentiate themselves from The Levellers, another populist group who opposed communal property ownership. When The True Levellers began to actively cultivate food on common land, people began referring to them as The Diggers. They took their inspiration from a New



Testament verse, “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common” (*New American Bible, Revised Edition*, Acts 4:32). They dreamed of a world where private property did not exist and all land was communally cultivated. These values were shared by another group of dissidents which formed more than 300 years later, so much so that the new group took the name The Diggers for themselves. The San Francisco Diggers, just like their namesake Diggers of the seventeenth century, believed in communal land sharing, and utilized common areas and recovered food in San Francisco to feed people.

The San Francisco Diggers formed in the mid-1960s, and their ultimate goal was to establish a society completely free of capitalism, free of all forms of buying and selling, and particularly free of private property. The San Francisco Diggers earned notoriety for serving free food every day in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park, utilizing public spaces as best they could. They would pick up leftovers from wholesale markets and make a vat of soup, which fed a few hundred people. The idea of ‘free’ was important to the Diggers, who wrote “free is magical because we have all experienced far too much slavery in our lives, and the idea of free is revolutionary precisely because there isn't much freedom in the land of the free these days. America keeps everything locked up pretty tight” (Free Food in the Panhandle). The free meals slowly petered out following the Summer of Love in 1967, however, they had ushered in a new era of food charity, particularly in the Bay Area.

The Diggers are one of the first examples in the United States of the present-day definition of gleaning: groups using leftover or recovered food to feed the hungry. However, the groups of the ‘60s and ‘70s were much more politically charged than today’s food recovery groups. The Diggers, The Black Panther Party, and myriad cooperative bakeries in San

Francisco and Oakland were popular for their social justice platforms as well as their free food (Fairfax, 26). The Diggers' overt challenges to social norms earned them the title of 'left-wing community anarchists,' but their use of public land for food distribution was the first step toward the modern definition of gleaning.

### **Food Recovery in the Bay Area**

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to the largest number of food recovery and gleaning organizations in the nation. Of the forty-six organizations in California, twenty-two are located in the Bay Area (Gleaning and Food Recovery Organizations). The close proximity of urban centers, such as San Francisco and Oakland, to areas of abundant agriculture, like Sonoma and San Joaquin Counties, allow residents to see both where the food comes from and the people who are not getting enough of it. The first food recovery group in the Bay Area was formed in 1987, when Mary Risley founded the San Francisco Food Runners. Risley, the founder of Tante Marie's Cooking School in San Francisco, teamed up with other food industry professionals to form an organization that picked up prepared food from restaurants, offices, and other businesses to distribute to the hungry (About: SF Food Runners). Despite the success of SF Food Runners, it would be nearly three decades before a similar organization was started in a different part of the Bay Area; ExtraFood began in Marin County in 2013. Contra Costa, Sonoma, and San Mateo Counties began food running soon after in the mid-2010s. While each of those companies actively picks up and delivers excess food, there are still others that utilize technology to improve the logistics and distribution of food recovery.<sup>1</sup> Food recovery often gets grouped

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<sup>1</sup>Waste No Food (2010) provides a web-based marketplace for excess food to be exchanged; Copia (2012) and Replate (2016) allow businesses with excess to request a pickup from food runners using an app; CropMobster (2014) is a food- and agriculture-based social media platform where people can post anything from a need for excess food pickup to a question about food waste and receive a crowdsourced solution.

together with gleaning when talking about the effort as a whole, but food recovery groups almost never deal with fresh produce unless they're picking up excess from a farmer's market.

Gleaning groups, however, focus solely on fresh produce, not dealing with prepared or packaged food.

In the Bay Area, where many subdivisions were built on top of orchards and many suburban homeowners have fruit trees in their backyards, gleaning seems like a natural solution. The first Bay Area gleaning group was formed in 2001, when Craig and Joni Diserens founded Village Harvest in Palo Alto. What started as a group to build community through interests in gardening and food preservation grew to become something much bigger when their first community event yielded 1,200 pounds of oranges (About: Village Harvest). More gleaning organizations sprung up in the Bay Area as technological advances made recruitment and logistics easier than ever, with many starting in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Today there are seventeen independent gleaning organizations dispersed among eight counties.

## Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

### Introduction

This literature review pulls from many different disciplines to present modern ideas about food waste, food charity, and health. Focus is directed to these attributes because they are the primary justifications gleaning organizations give as their reason for being: providing healthy food to those in need while also combating food waste. It is impossible to critically examine gleaning as it relates to food studies without also analyzing these three individual elements; without them, modern gleaning would not exist. Before discussing these elements, however, this review will provide context regarding the state of literature around the practice of gleaning itself, and how the topics researched in relation to gleaning have evolved as knowledge on the topic has grown.

With regards to food waste, this review pulls arguments from multiple scholars saying that gleaning is not a long-term, sustainable solution; its focus on individuals solving the problem through charity and volunteering only provides an immediate fix. Scholars point out that gleaning can encourage waste-reducing behaviors in the home, however, this argument is still based in individualism. From there this review discusses food charity, and how the neoliberal institution of emergency food distracts volunteers and politicians from advocating for long-term solutions to hunger. This is a key concept because gleaning organizations rely on the societal acceptance of short-term solutions to hunger, as well as the illusion of making a sustainable difference, in order to exist. After discussing food charity, this review considers the issue of health, particularly the argument that the perceived solution to becoming ‘healthier’ is simply *access* to healthy food and nutrition education. It is important to recognize modern society’s moralization of health as it relates to gleaning because gleaning organizations pride

themselves on providing “fresh, healthy produce” to the food insecure. This reinforces the neoliberal value of personal responsibility as well as the idea of the healthy self and the unhealthy other.

Understanding neoliberalism is key to a critical examination of gleaning because many of neoliberalism’s values (personal responsibility, individualism, and private instead of public solutions) are present in the modern discourse that discusses gleaning as a solution to societal problems. Neoliberalism can be defined as:

...a theory of political economic practice that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, 2007).

In other words, neoliberalism is the idea that a ‘free market’ and laissez-faire economic policy is the surest way to ensure efficiency, economic growth, and income distribution. It calls for hands-off social policy as well as economic policy; its encouragement of being a self-actualizing, choice-making individual allows for the government to shed the responsibility of taking care of its citizens. Instead, it delegates that responsibility to the citizens themselves. These neoliberal values shape the discourse surrounding gleaning; understanding the concept is vital to performing a critical examination of the practice.

## **Gleaning**

While plenty of literature exists focusing on food charity, food waste, and health, there is less written about the modern practice of gleaning as defined by this thesis. The information that is available has, for the most part, become available in the twenty first century, as gleaning has become more popularized as a win-win solution to food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food

waste. The research that has been done covers multiple topics, from historical contextualization (Vardi, 1993) to a challenge of local food discourse (Beischer, 2016). Looking at the evolution of topics written in relation to gleaning helps illustrate the evolution of society's awareness about the practice. When Liana Vardi wrote "Construing the Harvest: Gleaners, Farmers, and Officials in Early Modern France" in 1993, there was only one established gleaning organization in the United States. Gleaning was still a relatively unknown practice, so she provided historical contextualization. In 2001, Anne Hoisington provided answers to the question of what happens to the fruit after it's gleaned. Drage (2003), Badio (2009), Marshman (2015), and Beischer (2016) all wrote during the early twenty first century as gleaning became more established; people know what it is now and are trying to figure out how to use it to better society. The topical shift toward food justice illustrates that. Drage (2003) examines two gleaning organizations in Oregon, arguing that they have the ability to reduce poverty by increasing their attention on the development of human capital (individual skills and qualifications) and social capital (group relationships and support networks). Badio (2009) postulates that gleaning can be a method by which individuals and families can achieve food security, and Marshman (2015) analyzes volunteer motivations and how they perceive gleaning's role in community food security. Beischer (2016) uses gleaning as a framework to critically examine local food discourse.

Thus far, most of the focus has been on gleaning as a general practice, as well as on the individuals who participate in it. However, it seems there has been little attention paid to the organizations themselves, which provide the means for most gleaners to glean. This thesis aims to provide insight into this facet of gleaning, focusing on the discourse of gleaning organizations

in the United States and how they feel they fit into the bigger picture of food charity, health, and food waste.

## **Food Waste**

A desire to fight food waste is front and center in the mission statements of many gleaning organizations. Public awareness about food waste has grown substantially in the last twenty years because of increased public availability of data estimating the amount of food wasted annually in the United States and globally. The United States Department of Agriculture and the United Nations both released studies on the subject, in 1997 and 2011, respectively. In addition to estimating humanity's waste total, both studies discuss how crops being left in the field is one of the biggest contributors to food waste (Kantor et. al, 1997 and FAO, 2011). The farmer leaves the produce in the field because it is unsellable to a wholesaler; the produce may be the wrong size or shape, has signs of rot, or is not a desirable color. This is where gleaners come in, picking up the 'undesirable' produce that would otherwise rot in the field, and donating it to emergency food organizations. This thesis argues that gleaning aligns with the neoliberal idea of individuals fixing the country's problems through volunteering; it is not a permanent solution to agricultural waste, and while scholars have pointed out that it can encourage waste reducing behaviors in the home, this is still an individualistic viewpoint.

In terms of large-scale agricultural waste, gleaning is not a long-term, sustainable solution (Bloom 2011). Gleaning has been practiced for centuries, yet 133 billion pounds of food are wasted in the United States each year. The Los Angeles-based gleaning group Food Forward, one of the country's largest, claims to rescue 6.7 million pounds of produce per year (About: Food Forward). Even if each of the 140 gleaning organizations across the country

rescued this same volume, gleaning would still only rescue 0.7% of the food wasted in the United States each year. Farmers have been quoted saying they sometimes hold gleaning events more for good publicity (and the tax write-off) than for the actual harvest (Bloom, 233). Bloom also argues that more food can be rescued from ten minutes at the cull line of a wholesaler, where whole loads of produce are rejected, than can be harvested in eight hours of gleaning. However, since gleaning is more glamorous, visibly aligning with modern ‘back-to-the-land’ sensibilities as well as providing exercise, a way to get outside, and a way to build a community, volunteers are far less likely to collect culls from a wholesaler. Other scholars point out similar arguments; they argue more food could be saved if farmers were incentivized to not overplant and to harvest their entire crop, or if the tax code was revised to make it easier for farmers to donate a percentage of their harvest (Clapp, 2002; Gunders, 2012).

While gleaning is not presented as a solution to the problem of agricultural waste, some scholars propose that gleaning can foster more actions toward waste reduction in the home, the number one site of food waste. This may be true, however, this viewpoint still places an emphasis on individualism, arguing that it’s an individual’s job to fix a problem that could be handled more swiftly by the state. Anne Hoisington et. al (2001) argue that gleaning projects can open doors toward and encourage other methods of reducing household food waste, including food preservation through canning, freezing, drying, and pickling, as well as composting, gardening, and sharing with neighbors. Others argue that getting “closer to the source of food” helps people recognize where their food comes from and the work that went into making it, therefore making them less likely to waste it (Beischer 2016, Marshman 2015). While these arguments are valid, and may contribute to a decrease in the amount of food waste gleaners create, they are based on the idea that individuals have the responsibility of fixing the food waste



problem, as opposed to the government. These arguments de-incentivize gleaners and politicians from advocating for more long-term solutions to food waste.

### **Food Charity and Emergency Food**

Food charity movements themselves are not a modern idea, but the way emergency food is used now, as a long-term subsidy instead of short-term relief, is. Food charity and emergency food as they exist today have become seemingly permanent institutions in the United States over the past forty years. People throughout the United States have stepped up and continue to donate non-perishable food by the ton and volunteer hundreds of hours through their schools, places of worship, and sports teams. However, scholars argue that this model of private charity is not a sustainable solution to hunger. Beginning with the ideas put forth by Janet Poppendieck in her 1998 seminal work, *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, this review follows the argument that food banks and emergency food in general are not the answer to ending hunger. In fact, they prevent us from enacting policies that address the actual root of hunger – poverty. This is an important point to recognize in a critical examination of gleaning; gleaning organizations are actively engaged members of the emergency food system, and further the notion that alleviating immediate hunger is a sustainable solution to long-term hunger.

Poppendieck asserts that the neoliberal social and economic policies of the 1980s provided the catalyst for the rise and eventual institutionalization of emergency food in the United States. She states that neoliberalism's focus on charity and the individual frames food insecurity the wrong way. Americans view food insecurity as a failure on the part of the individual rather than the state, and therefore do not question the social structures that make food insecurity possible in the first place. This argument has not decreased in relevance since

Poppendieck first declared it in 1998. In fact, many other scholars have argued similarly, including Daponte & Bade (2007) and Beth Dixon (2017). Daponte & Bade extend Poppendieck's research into the twenty-first century, discussing how neoliberal social policies continue to make private food assistance more popular than public assistance among the food insecure. Dixon takes a narrative approach, discussing how society tells the stories of those experiencing food insecurity, glorifying experiences that showcase individual victories over those that don't. They come to the same conclusion as Poppendieck: emergency food provides a "moral safety valve," allowing pressure to be taken off the government to pass any legislation that would alleviate the root cause of hunger — poverty (Poppendieck 98). Food banks and emergency food providers further the notion that private charity is the solution to every societal ill, and that the government doesn't need to intervene because no one will starve. This is not intentional; these scholars do not argue that emergency food organizations are not doing good and necessary work, instead arguing that society uses these organizations as an insufficient replacement for welfare safety nets. Contemporary gleaning organizations are the result of neoliberal social policy and the idea that private charity will fix the problem of hunger, and they are part of a system that prevents real, long-term solutions from being discussed.

### **'Health' and Food Access**

A primary reason gleaning organizations cite for their existence is that gleaning is a way to "provide healthy food to our most vulnerable populations" (Farm to Pantry). On the surface, this is a rather innocuous claim, as fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive and often missing from food banks' shelves, and are thus unavailable to many food insecure groups. This review follows the arguments of several researchers in the field of health and healthism, who argue that

the United States' health fetish leads to a dichotomizing of food and people as good and bad, and that those who see themselves as good often try to reform those whom they see as bad. This is a key concept to look at when critically examining gleaning; gleaning organizations exist on the basis of a group providing their idea of healthy food to another group they see as being unhealthy. This dichotomizing of food and people into categories of healthy and unhealthy is harmful and gets in the way of solving problems of food insecurity and its underlying causes.

“Healthism,” as defined by sociologist Robert Crawford (2006), is a major player in the individualistic attitudes toward health prevalent in the twenty-first century. Healthism is an important concept to think about when it comes to gleaning because without the United States' national obsession with health, gleaning would not appeal to the nation's sensibilities in the same way. Crawford coined the term “healthism” in 1980 “to describe a striking moralization of health among middle class Americans” (410). Crawford was drawing on popular attitudes of the 1970s for the inspiration of the term, when holistic and increasingly non-Western methods of healing and “self-help” were trending. The concept aligned with the New Left's anti-corporate leanings and applauded populist, grassroots, and cooperative models for attaining goods and services. However, the healthist sensibility became less communal and more isolationist as it reached the 1980s. Then-President Ronald Reagan's 1981 call for voluntarism and cuts to the nation's welfare system re-emphasized the neoliberal value of personal responsibility in the eyes of the nation. This carried over to the new “supervalue” of health. The new focus on the individual meant bodily practices which seemed to indicate willpower, responsibility, and self-control were easily associated with personal qualities that lead to both individual and collective success. If someone looked ‘healthy,’ they were a good, hard-working citizen, and if someone didn't look ‘healthy,’ they were lazy and self-indulgent. In this context, gleaning is a healthist

practice; it relies on the United States' obsession with being 'healthy' in order to impassion people to volunteer.

Several other researchers have built on Crawford's initial theory of healthism. The first advancement is the idea that thoughts about healthy/good and unhealthy/bad food directly translate to thoughts about morally good and bad people. The second is that people separate themselves into two camps: the healthy self and the unhealthy other (Biltekoff 173, Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2963, Metzl 5). Julie Guthman (2011) adds another layer to these arguments, postulating that the mostly-white alternative food movements assume the universality of white, middle class values when they try to bring 'healthy' food to food insecure communities. They assume the 'unhealthy other' will immediately accept the 'healthy' food that is being brought to them ("Bringing Good Food to Others" 2956). All of these researchers argue that disapproval toward 'unhealthy' foods results in condemnation of the people who consume those foods. However, many food activists also believe that people can be 'redeemed' from their unhealthy lifestyles if they "get out of that way of eating" (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2962). Gleaning provides an example for these arguments about healthism; gleaning organizations and their volunteers recognize themselves as being part of one camp (the healthy self), separate from the food insecure populations they donate to (the unhealthy other). They donate produce to food banks in the hope that the food insecure will recognize the 'healthy' produce as the 'right choice' and will be redeemed by making that choice.

One of the main arguments that gleaning organizations and other food justice advocates maintain is the access argument, the idea that it is simply the lack of *access* to healthy food that causes people to be unhealthy. Gleaning attempts to remedy this by providing fresh produce to food banks, so the food insecure have access to healthy fruits and vegetables. Guthman refers to

this as a “supply-side argument” (69). Supply-side arguments are easy to swallow because by their nature they provide seemingly easy solutions; just install new supermarkets in food insecure areas and make sure food banks are well-stocked with fresh produce and the problem will be solved. However, this masks the bigger picture of food insecurity. Guthman proposes that the access argument doesn’t take into account the lifestyles and limitations of the people in the communities it’s trying to fix. In fact, a 2014 study by Cummins et. al found that the installation of a new grocery store in a low income area of Philadelphia had no significant impact on the area’s dietary practices (286). The access argument does not accept the fact that someone might not have a place to store fresh produce, will not be able to cook it in time before it goes bad (many families only get one bag from the food bank a month), or that someone who commutes a long way to and from work might not be able to fix a home-cooked meal every night. While many gleaning organizations argue that increasing access to ‘healthy’ food will improve the health of food insecure populations, lifestyle limitations continue to make the consumption of fresh produce unrealistic to them.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

How do Bay Area gleaning organizations present themselves as fitting into the larger conversation around food recovery? This thesis sought to explore this question by performing textual analysis on the websites of five different gleaning organizations from different counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. Websites are as important for analysis as print texts. In the age of Google, a website is often the first chance an organization has to make an impression on a reader, and it will use that space to make its missions and ideologies known. This thesis focuses on websites because they are curated; while they are not un-changing, they are a carefully thought-out and purposefully constructed medium through which the organization can present itself. Textual analysis consisted of both qualitative and quantitative methods which, when used in tandem, provided more information together than they could have provided separately. This chapter reviews the methodology used in the completion of this project, as well as the mode of analysis and how this thesis defines it.

### **Textual Analysis**

Language is how people create meaning. A “text” is the medium through which those words can be used to create meaning. According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1975), texts are “literary and visual constructs, employing sym-bolic means, shaped by rules, conventions and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in its widest sense” (17). A “text” can be a book, movie, website, song, podcast, or television show, and each can be interpreted in an effort to understand a part of the relationship between media, culture, and society. Analyzing the words, ideas, and themes of a text through a certain lens can help uncover the traces of socially

constructed reality that texts provide (Brennen, 2017). Textual analysis uses the meaning found in text to understand how people use texts to make sense of their lives.

This thesis uses quantitative and qualitative textual analysis together to provide a more complete analysis of each organization's website. Quantitative analysis was performed first in order to form preliminary conclusions about the primary values of each organization. Quantitative analysis provided data that could be used to make word clouds, visual representations of word frequency that, when analyzed, can better help a reader understand the values most important to an organization. Subsequently, this thesis used qualitative analysis to consider the underlying meanings and contexts for those values. Analysis included the official websites of five different gleaning organizations: Farm to Pantry, The Urban Farmers, Alameda Backyard Growers, Village Harvest, and Harvest Sacramento. This thesis focused on these organizations due to their representation of different locales within the San Francisco Bay Area, and because they had websites with enough material for analysis. Only relevant web pages within the websites were analyzed. Relevant web pages are those containing content pertaining specifically to gleaning; for example, both Alameda Backyard Growers' and Harvest Sacramento's websites include information that has nothing to do with their gleaning programs, like news on the progress of a community garden butterfly habitat and tips on herbal medicines. Such pages were excluded from analysis.

**Quantitative analysis.** The first method of analysis used in this review was quantitative analysis – a direct comparison of the words used on organizations' websites, as well as the frequency of words used. Quantitative analysis has not often been used in scholarship exploring gleaning, and it is less commonly used than qualitative analysis in food studies scholarship in general. One notable exception is Anne Hoisington et. al (2001), whose case study of gleaners in

Washington state was one of the first pieces of scholarship about gleaning to use quantitative methods. They used quantitative methods to analyze what happened to the produce after it was gleaned, and discovered the exact percentage of fruit that was donated to charity or kept by gleaners, and what they subsequently did with it.

This project used quantitative data to analyze each organizations' website; every relevant webpage was put through word frequency software (Online-Utility.org) to analyze which words were used the most. This software provided word frequency by total times used as well as by percentage of the total words on the website. Word frequency data was used to create a word cloud for each organization, using Wordclouds.com. Word clouds are a visual representation of word frequency; the more often a word is used, the larger it appears in the word cloud. Word clouds are valuable because they can provide information at a glance. Without one sentence of analysis, readers can look at the word clouds of the five organizations and recognize how different they are from each other. The subsequent qualitative analysis goes deeper into how and why they are different.

**Qualitative analysis.** Qualitative analysis was performed following quantitative analysis in order to form a more complete and contextualized analysis. Textual analysis used to consist only of quantitative analysis, until German sociologist and critical theorist Siegfried Kracauer (1952-1953) questioned its reliability and objectivity. Brennan (2017) uses Kracauer to argue that quantitative analysis only analyzed the surface levels of text, focusing only on repetition and not on the underlying intentions of the text as a whole. Analysis resulting from only quantitative data would be rendered incomplete and lacking depth because it did not take context or connections to society at large into account (Brennan, 206). While quantitative data is useful in performing preliminary conclusions about the values of the gleaning organizations, qualitative



analysis must also be formed in order to achieve a more complete and contextualized analysis. This method of analysis was preferred because websites are consistent and carefully curated. This thesis defines curation as selecting, organizing, and presenting content in a certain way; museums, galleries, and libraries have curators who pick which pieces to display in order to put forward what they feel is the best representation of someone's work. Websites work in the same way. Gleaning organizations use words and images to present themselves in the best way they can on their websites, and these presentations differ between organizations.

Ideological analysis was the primary qualitative analysis method of this project. Ideology is defined as “the dominant ideas of an individual, group, class or society, the way meanings are socially produced, or even as the false ideas upon which a social, political or economic system is based” (Brennan, 211). Brennan argues that texts represent the dominant ideology of a culture at a specific time and place in history. These dominant ideologies appear to be common sense – “things that we logically did, rationally decided and morally believed were right” (Brennan, 212). Texts help us to construct our knowledge of these ideologies. For this project, ideological analysis was conducted using a framework of three values: food charity, health, and food waste. The specific method of analysis was based on Mike Cormack's method, outlined in his 1992 book *Ideology*, which emphasizes five areas for analysis: content, structure, absence, style, and mode of address. In the context of this thesis, content describes the actual “meat” of the websites – language, opinions, beliefs, value judgments, characterizations of people and groups, and other aspects of the text itself. Content helps make clear how social reality is constructed. Structure refers to how the website is set up. How are photos and text used together? Is there a specific order in which the organization wants a reader to navigate its site? These questions can help us better understand the organization's agenda. Absence is a crucial aspect of analysis; absence is

something you would expect to be there but isn't. For this thesis, if a website contains no language pertaining to one of the three main values (food charity, health, food waste), that needs to be carefully considered. Which framework is missing and why is an important aspect of understanding each organization's values. Style relates to the visual aspects of the website separate from text, things like colors, fonts, and images. When analyzing mode of address, the question is asked, does the language of the website speak directly to the audience, or does it use indirect address? Taking these five areas of analysis together help to form a complete and contextualized analysis and better understand the role of ideology in a text.

## Chapter 5: Results

*“It’s kind of corny, but if I don’t save this carrot for God’s purposes, it’s gone.”*

--Eighty-year old Gleaner

Janet Poppendieck. *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, 1998

### Introduction

Each of the five organizations was founded in a different locale in the Bay Area (California), and each presents itself as having a different mission and a different way of fitting into the larger conversation surrounding contemporary food recovery. This section analyzes the language used on the organizations’ websites using the theoretical frameworks of food charity, health, and food waste in order to better understand how each organization presents itself as a part of the discourse surrounding food recovery. While discussing those theoretical frameworks, this section also explores how each organization uses language related to community and class. The following biographies are introductions to each organization, including a short explanation of the organization’s background, one or two images that represent the organization, and the word cloud generated using the word frequency data for each organization.

**Farm to Pantry (FTP).** Farm to Pantry is a community-and-health-oriented gleaning group based in Healdsburg, Sonoma County. It has been in operation since 2008. FTP uses its website to showcase the community it has built; each page is topped with a large banner of rotating images showing groups of people actively gleaning or smiling for a photo, usually wearing FTP’s signature lime green shirts (see Figure 2).

**Farm to Pantry**  
*Cultivating Community through Healthy Food*



Figure 2: Farm to Pantry's logo and slogan



Figure 3: A group of Farm to Pantry Gleaners, showcasing their focus on community



volunteers, it also relies heavily on graphics, which are used to illustrate ideas that group and candid photos cannot (see Figure 4).



Figure 5: The Urban Farmers' logo



Figure 6: A graphic included on The Urban Farmers' website on the page about Open Source Production. This exemplifies The Urban Farmers' focus on work and efficiency.







Figure 8: Alameda Backyard Growers' logo



Figure 6: Group of gleaners at a parade in July of 2012. This photo shows ABG's emphasis on community.







Area. It uses its website as a source of information, not just for its volunteers, but for anyone who may view the site. It provides many resources not related to gleaning, from how to plant and maintain a fruit tree to step-by-step recipes for marmalade and infused oils. VH's website has the most pages of the organizations analyzed, but the least amount of photos; it commits more time and energy to providing information than it does to showcasing community or promoting itself. VH doesn't present itself as being a single solution to food insecurity, poor nutrition, or food waste, but as part of a much bigger, multifaceted solution.

**Harvest Sacramento (HS).** Harvest Sacramento is a community-oriented gleaning organization based in Sacramento. It was started in 2009 by two Sacramento residents, Mary McGrath and Robin Aurelius, who “were pained at the sight of the rotten oranges that littered the streets every spring” (Harvest Sacramento). The organization saw success in early 2009 when it donated 3,000 pounds of produce to the Sacramento Food Bank in just a few months. It was brought under the wing of SoilBorn Farms soon after, in order to receive more resources and better community outreach. SoilBorn Farms is a Sacramento-based organization that focuses on urban food growing, gardening, and food preservation.



Figure 12: Harvest Sacramento logo



## Analysis by Theme

Analysis of the five gleaning organizations in this study reveal how different organizations see themselves as fitting into the larger conversation surrounding food charity, health, and food waste, and how each organization expresses those views using language. Upon first analysis, the ‘personalities’ of each organization became clear through the word choices and tone used on each online platform.

## Food Charity

**Theoretical framework.** This section discusses food charity, and how the gleaning organizations differ in terms of how they present their roles in it. Janet Poppendieck’s argument about emergency food organizations being a “moral safety valve” in the long-term fight against hunger is an important framework in this section (98). She argues that emergency food as an institution is not a sustainable solution to food insecurity and that it can actually prevent people from engaging meaningfully with the underlying cause of hunger – poverty. This section further builds on Poppendieck’s argument, arguing that the modern practice of gleaning creates the same “moral safety valve” as other forms of food charity (98). No matter how much a gleaning organization presents itself as being or not being a solution to food insecurity, they are, by design, moral safety valves. They provide an immediate solution to hunger by providing food on a day-to-day basis, but the good feeling volunteers get from providing that immediate relief distracts them from working toward or advocating for more long-term solutions.

**Gleaning and class.** Analyzing the problem of food insecurity is impossible without discussing class. The relationship between gleaning and class has changed from its historical practice to its modern one. When gleaning was practiced in feudal times, it was the food

insecure people who gleaned to provide for themselves. Today, the food insecure are not providing for themselves, it is the food *secure* who are gleaned and making the produce available at food banks for the food insecure to acquire. This thesis argues that while this is not necessarily a problem in the short-term (it is obviously a good thing that the food insecure are able to procure fresh produce, which adds variety and micronutrients to the diet), the food insecure's lack of agency in this system, as well as the continued othering of the food insecure by gleaners, proves to be a problem in the long-term.

One way the organizations' websites illustrate class disparity is through their discourse about community. Two of the groups are heavily focused on community building, but the words used on their websites show that they are mainly interested in forming insular communities that do not include the food insecure groups they serve. Only one organization includes the food insecure groups it serves in its gleaning community. Two are not as actively focused on community building, instead trying to reach as many people as possible. Each organization's ideas about community are made clear through the level of inclusivity in the language on its website, particularly words like "we," "they," and the descriptors it uses to describe itself, its community, and the food insecure groups it serves.

Farm to Pantry and Alameda Backyard Growers both list community building as among their top priorities. Farm to Pantry's slogan is "Cultivating Community Through Healthy Food." Alameda Backyard Growers' slogan is "Growing Community One Veggie At A Time." Clearly, each organization places an emphasis on community building, but further analysis of the organizations' websites show that the communities they wish to build are isolated ones. ABG refers to itself as a "community of growers," and a "small group of people with big hearts." The community to which it is referring is the community of group members, not the Alameda

community at large. Farm to Pantry separates itself from its greater Sonoma locale by using the phrase “our most vulnerable neighbors” to describe the people it serves, and describing itself as a “community of growers and volunteers.” This phrasing juxtaposes Farm to Pantry as the opposite of the “vulnerable neighbors,” making it obvious that the food insecure groups are separate from its group of gleaners. ABG and FTP are building communities, but they are separate from the rest of their respective regions, and separate from the at-risk people they are serving.

Harvest Sacramento is the only organization to acknowledge or discuss the fact that some of the food insecure populations it serves can also come gleaning with them. The communities generated by the other organizations are insular: the gleaning group and the food insecure groups it serves are separate and never interact. However, Harvest Sacramento lists “Provide the opportunity for those in need to support themselves and gather some of their own food” as one of the major benefits of their program. In doing so, the organization attempts to give the food insecure communities agency in their own food choices, at the same time breaking the “healthy self and unhealthy other” dichotomy by bringing the two together. Harvest Sacramento does not present itself as being a ‘healthy self’ and the food insecure groups as the ‘unhealthy other.’ Harvest Sacramento is the least urban of the five gleaning organizations; Sacramento is an area known for its agriculture, and the city is surrounded by farmland. This necessitates that a large number of low-paid farm laborers live in and around the city of Sacramento, making the connection of food insecurity and agriculture even more prevalent in the area. It could be for this reason that Harvest Sacramento is the only organization to actively invite the food insecure to glean.

Both Village Harvest and The Urban Farmers try to reach as many people as possible. However, they attempt to achieve this in different ways; Village Harvest's method attempts to be inclusive, while The Urban Farmers' method is exclusive. Village Harvest is inclusive because its resources are available to anybody with access to the internet, regardless of whether they are included in VH's specific gleaning community. There is a resource for everyone: a prospective gleaner, a gardener, a food bank recipient, or a South Bay resident. VH has resources on planting backyard trees, maintaining orchards, gardening in general, reducing household food waste, fruit storage, and making marmalade. Someone who doesn't live in the South Bay could use VH's master list to find a gleaning organization in their area; there are links to groups all over the country. If someone had no interest in actually gleaning, they could still get a wealth of information from VH's site. Someone who received produce from a food bank in the South Bay could also use VH's resources to find ways to use the produce they received.

The Urban Farmers, while it is attempting to reach a wide audience by encouraging readers to start their own chapters, is less inclusive in who it is trying to reach. The language on The Urban Farmers' website suggests that it is only interested in reaching someone who has the resources to start their own chapter of TUF. As an action-oriented organization, its language implies a focus on making a positive impression on those with the assets available to continue its mission, as opposed to community building or empowering food insecure groups. As a result, loaded "we" phrases like "we are building," "we have developed," and "we can help" appear on The Urban Farmers' website, presenting an air of intelligence and originality, as if TUF is trying to impress its readers.

**Gleaning as a solution.** Each gleaning organization donates to emergency food organizations like food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens; it is an integral part of the



definition of modern gleaning. However, each organization approaches food charity differently. The spectrum runs from Farm to Pantry presenting itself as a complete local solution to hunger, to Alameda Backyard Growers, which sees food charity as a bonus to its community-building group. Some organizations appear to have a more complex idea of gleaning's role in food security; The Urban Farmers discusses poverty as the underlying cause of food insecurity, and Harvest Sacramento lists "Provide the opportunity for those in need to support themselves and gather some of their own food" among its goals.

Farm to Pantry and The Urban Farmers both present themselves as solutions to food insecurity. However, each organization has a different scope. Farm to Pantry aims to supply a local solution, while The Urban Farmers hopes its organization will be the model for a systemic solution. Farm to Pantry is community-oriented, while The Urban Farmers is action-oriented. The language used on the organizations' websites brings these differences into relief. Farm to Pantry's continual use of the words "community" and "vulnerable neighbors" indicates that its scope is narrowed in on the geographic area it serves: Sonoma County. The Urban Farmers, on the other hand, promotes its organizational model as one that should be replicated in communities around the country as a systemic solution to food insecurity. Statements on The Urban Farmers website such as "To change the world for the better, we need a lot of people to do a little" as well as describing itself as a "social justice organization" prove The Urban Farmers' desire for widespread change beyond the boundaries of its locale. The community versus action orientation of the two organizations is further exemplified by the way each describes what it does: Farm to Pantry describes "serving a need," while The Urban Farmers describes "solving a problem." However, despite each organization's attempt at presenting a solution, neither holds up when analyzed through the lens of Poppendieck's critique. Both organizations are focused on

providing immediate emergency food, a strategy Poppendieck argues is not a sustainable solution to hunger on a local or systemic level. Farm to Pantry's claim that "we are looking to close the hunger gap through gleaning" indicates a continued misunderstanding by the middle-class of the underlying causes of food insecurity.

Alameda Backyard Growers is on the other end of the spectrum; it doesn't present itself as a solution to food insecurity. Food charity, for ABG, seems to be an opportune bonus of its community-building project. The language used on its website exemplifies this, particularly a quote from one of its founders, Janice Edwards. In a "Founder's Story" video on ABG's website, Edwards stated:

Our other tagline was 'grow some, keep some, give some away,' and that was sort of the mission, encouraging people to grow a little extra food in their yard ... when you're done feeding yourself, your family, your friends, your neighbors, if you have a little extra, bring it to the food bank and share it with neighbors in need (Founder's Story).

The priority list is stated plainly: yourself, your family, your friends, your neighbors, and finally, "neighbors in need." ABG has a yearly donation goal and says the Alameda Food Bank "loves what we're doing," but still lists community building as its top priority.

Village Harvest and Harvest Sacramento both present themselves as being one of many possible ways someone could make an impact on food insecurity. Village Harvest's website includes resources on places someone could donate fruit if they wanted to pick it themselves, and includes a master list of the nation's gleaning organizations for someone who doesn't live in the South Bay Area. Harvest Sacramento is a part of a larger organization, SoilBorn Farms, whose focus is centered on urban farming and community supported agriculture; those are two other parts of the solution besides gleaning. Both Village Harvest and Harvest Sacramento use

language suggesting that gleaning is not the sole solution to food insecurity, but it is part of the solution.

## **Health**

**Theoretical framework.** This section focuses on the similarities and differences in how the organizations approach the idea of health, or more specifically, the idea that gleaning can be a solution to poor nutrition in at-risk communities. Robert Crawford (2006) and Julie Guthman's (2011) arguments about healthism are used as a framework in this section, Crawford created the term "healthism" in 1980 to describe how health was being used by middle class Americans as a way to measure morality and 'goodness.' Someone who didn't follow a typically 'healthy diet,' who ate fast food and soft drinks and frozen dinners, was seen as less morally upstanding and not as good of a citizen as someone who ate 'healthy.' Julie Guthman added to Crawford's argument, saying that class separation often exists between the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy.' Eating a 'healthy diet,' full of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, etc. is expensive, and someone below or near the poverty line is unlikely to be able to afford to eat in such a way.

**Health and community.** The word choice on the organizations' websites illustrates where health falls on their lists of priorities. Farm to Pantry is on one end of the spectrum, and Alameda Backyard Growers and Harvest Sacramento are on the other end. Farm to Pantry places a heavy emphasis on health, while Alameda Backyard Growers and Harvest Sacramento don't – in fact, the word is not mentioned once on either website. Farm to Pantry's focus on health is illustrated in its slogan, the first thing visible on its website: "Cultivating Community Through Healthy Food." The word "through" is a point of interest here. FTP is not cultivating

community *and* healthy food, which would keep the two entities separate, it is cultivating community *through* healthy food. The language of the slogan suggests healthy food is the vessel through which community will be cultivated; without healthy food, the mission would fall apart. It also suggests FTP has no interest in cultivating community around food that isn't healthy; in fact, "healthy" is FTP's most commonly used signifier on its site when describing community. It uses the word "cultivating" in the same way one would use "developing" or "nurturing," illustrating that it does not believe it currently has a healthy community, but there will be one in the future. FTP's language suggests it is looking forward to a time when it inhabits a healthy community that makes healthy choices – a sort of utopia. The groups FTP is helping, whom it is calling "our vulnerable neighbors," are the also the groups it sees as holding the community back from that healthy, utopian image. Alameda Backyard Growers and Harvest Sacramento, on the other hand, don't care how community is created, just that it is. Village Harvest also discusses the effect of health on community, using the phrase "building a healthier community for all." However, unlike Farm to Pantry, the signifier "for all" is inclusive of everyone, both the staff and volunteers at Village Harvest and the food insecure groups it is serving.

**The access argument.** The three organizations that mention health have different relationship with the access argument; the thought that merely giving the food insecure *access* to healthy food will solve the problem of poor nutrition. Gleaning places the same emphasis on eating fresh, local, seasonal, and organic foods as many other facets of the alternative food movement, but is rarely, if ever, criticized. Gleaning is held up as an incredible solution to poor nutrition as well as to food insecurity and food waste by government organizations, gleaning organizations, and many volunteers. This is because gleaning gives people access to fresh, local, seasonal, and organic produce at no cost, which is viewed as solving the whole problem. While

it is true that the problem of expense may be solved through gleaning, there are many other factors contributing to the food insecure's food choices. Convenience, time, storability, and versatility are all factors gleaning doesn't solve. Assuming that access is all that's needed for a food insecure person to eat 'healthy' shows a misunderstanding by the middle class of the reasons behind the food choices of the food insecure: multiple jobs, long commutes, and insufficient cooking facilities, equipment, and storage are also aspects that must be considered. The access argument places an emphasis on the value of personal choice and responsibility, and in turn condemns those who make 'unhealthy choices.' Farm to Pantry, The Urban Farmers, and Village Harvest all put value on health, but all use the access argument differently. FTP's mission statement includes the phrase "to provide a continuous supply of fresh, healthy produce to the most vulnerable members who lack access to these choices." "Vulnerable neighbors who lack access to these choices" is a loaded phrase that separates the people at FTP (staff and volunteers) from the people it serves. This language suggests that FTP is the 'healthy self,' opposite the 'unhealthy other' of the food bank recipients, and that the food bank recipients will recognize the 'right choice' of their donated produce. The Urban Farmers mentions health far less than Farm to Pantry, but when it does, it uses the access argument. It introduces slightly more nuance than FTP, as it discusses poverty as the underlying cause of food insecurity and poor nutrition, but still includes phrases like "The poor and the impoverished find themselves lacking access to food, never mind healthy food" (The Problem). Village Harvest is the only organization that mentions health, but doesn't bring up the access argument. It uses phrases like "your produce will make a healthy difference," but doesn't specify the *access* to healthy food as the thing making the difference.

## Food Waste

**Theoretical framework.** This section discusses the way gleaning organizations present themselves as having an impact on food waste. Its role in the reduction of food waste is one of the reasons gleaning is so highly regarded by the general public; many gleaning organizations were started in the first place because the founders couldn't stand the sight of so much fruit rotting on their neighbors' backyard trees. This section uses Jonathan Bloom's (2011) argument that gleaning is not a long-term solution for agricultural waste as a framework for analysis. Bloom argues that there are other forms of gathering unwanted food that are more effective than gleaning, but because gleaning is in line with modern 'back-to-the-land' sensibilities and provides other benefits to the volunteers and the farms, those other methods are rarely undertaken (233). This section discusses gleaning as aligning with the individualistic notion of volunteering as a way to fix the country's problems. Gleaning is not a permanent solution to agricultural waste, and while scholars have pointed out that it can encourage waste reducing behaviors in the home, this is still an individualistic viewpoint.

**Food waste and individualism.** Each organization brings up food waste in some form on its website. Some focus on it more than others, providing instructions on food storage and preservation to prevent food waste in the home. Those that don't provide these resources still discuss gleaning as having a positive impact on food waste, quoting the number of pounds of fruit they have gleaned as "pounds of waste diverted from a landfill." When providing information for people with fruit trees to list their trees as 'available to glean,' many organizations use commanding, negative language such as "Don't let your fruit go to waste!" and "Instead of letting your fruit go to waste or become a nuisance, share" (About: The Urban

Farmers)! Only two organizations took this a step further, providing resources and group encouragement in household food waste reduction.

Alameda Backyard Growers focuses on food waste more than any other gleaning group. However, it does not use language suggesting that it or its organizational model is a solution to the food waste problem. Even though the challenge it participated in was the “Stop Food Waste Challenge,” the primary focus was on “reducing” food waste through Project Pick, and by offering resources to help individuals reduce their household food waste. ABG focused on “implement[ing] simple food saving tools (such as a shopping list or produce storage guide) while keeping a journal of [their] experiences” (Stop Food Waste Challenge: ABG) The challenge concluded with a fridge audit and “an opportunity to share our experiences with the greater community at a culminating event.” Even when ABG is focusing on food waste, its primary goal is still community building. Village Harvest, again, presents itself as one of many possible ways to prevent food waste. For someone who isn’t interested in gleaning, they have resources on post-harvest handling and proper storage of fruit, as well as tips on fruit preservation and recipe ideas.

None of the organizations’ websites provide any resources or information on other ways waste could be prevented in the harvest fields, despite the fact that the harvest field is where gleaning attempts to have the most impact. The websites that have waste reduction resources are all focused on reducing waste in the home. While consumers’ homes are the largest source of food waste, this continues to illustrate gleaning’s emphasis on individuals solving large-scale problems.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The websites of Farm to Pantry, The Urban Farmers, Alameda Backyard Growers, Village Harvest, and Harvest Sacramento illustrate that gleaning is not the one-dimensional, purely unproblematic practice that many media outlets make it out to be. The language used on these websites, when analyzed through the lenses of food charity, health, and food waste, showcases the stark differences between the organizations, as well as how they present themselves as fitting into the larger conversation surrounding food recovery. This thesis' analysis also showcases just how ingrained neoliberal values of personal responsibility and individualism are in the United States and how difficult it can be to take steps forward, even in places as famously progressive as the San Francisco Bay Area. However, many emergency food organizations in the area are beginning to make advocacy a bigger part of their efforts. The San Francisco-Marin Food Bank and the Alameda County Community Food Bank have both raised their voices in favor of reforms to California's food stamp system, public school lunches, and other public food programs (Galinson, 2018).

There were times while I was writing this thesis that I struggled to grapple with my feelings toward gleaning. I was reading (and making) so many arguments about how gleaning, emergency food, and charity in general are not solutions to food insecurity, poor nutrition, and food waste that I started to believe that it was all for naught. There were many times where I was nervous about the prospect of my parents reading this thesis, because I felt I was arguing that their endeavors were pointless in the long run. But this way of thinking, like the articles lauding gleaning as the solution to all societal ills, is an oversimplification. As stated in this thesis' first chapter: gleaning, like everything else, is complicated. Gleaning may not solve problems in the long term, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have value. That doesn't mean we



should just stop doing it. People still need food today, tomorrow, and the next day. It still doesn't feel right to let perfectly good fruit on a tree fall to the ground and rot just because picking it isn't going to help lower the cost of housing or pass legislation that lessens income inequality.

As this thesis began with a painting, it also ends with one – the same one. *The Gleaners* offers up a simple visualization of gleaning: three women in the foreground stooped over to collect grain for themselves. Only when one takes focus off the women and studies the background can one completely understand the commentary Jean-Francois Millet was making; the huge piles of grain surrounded by people and several men on horseback throw the women in the foreground into greater, more painful relief. I never studied the background of the painting in all the years I looked at it growing up, so I never understood why the women were gleaning or the societal structures putting them in that position. This same critical eye must be cast upon the modern practice of gleaning, so that real progress can actually be made.

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